Helping Children Through Trauma

Lt Col Taylor, Child Psychiatrist

Major Bates, Capt Hatch, Capt Howard, Psychology Residents

Life Skills Support Center

Malcolm Grow Medical Center

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Overview

- What to Expect from Children
- How to Respond
- When to Seek Help

Normal Reactions

- Reactions vary
- Normal responses by normal people to an abnormal event
- Responses tend to fall into age-appropriate categories

Fear Reactions

Common fears

- **Separation from primary caretakers (bed time, daycare or school avoidance)**
- **Safety of self and others**

Influenced by

- **Parental reactions**

Normal Reactions: Ages 1-6

Indirect expression through behavioral and physical reactions

- **Regressive behaviors (thumb-sucking)**
- **Crying, neediness, and excessive clinging**
- **Sleep disturbances (avoid bed)**
- **Physical complaints (stomach aches)**

Normal Reactions: Ages 6-11

More direct expression

- **Regressive behaviors**
- **Sleep disturbances**
- **Physical complaints**
- **Angry outbursts**
- **Aggressive play (working through process)**
- **Magical explanations to fill in gaps in understanding**
- **Difficulty concentrating (poor school performance)**

Normal Reactions: Ages 12-18

Most like adult responses

- **Regressive behaviors**
- **Sleep and eating disturbances**
- **External behaviors (acting out)**
- **Internalizing behaviors (increased self-consciousness or guilt)**
- **Wish for revenge**

Caring for Self

- **Help yourself so that you can help others**
- **Basic self care**

Caring for your Child

- Encourage children to talk -- they are aware
- Speak to children calmly and at their level
- Be aware that children tend to think literally
- Provide emotional support and listen (especially at night)
- Normalize fear or regressive behaviors
- Limit media exposure
- Encourage pleasurable activities (sports, reading, music)

How to Help your Child Feel Safe

- Maintain routines
- Reassure them that they are safe (e.g., the problem is being handled)
- Demonstrate love physically and verbally
- Model expression of concerns AND confidence (in self, world, and future)

When to Seek Help

- Responses significantly interfere with school or home
- Child's reactions last longer than a month
- Child's behavior endangers self or other
- Parent's responses to trauma interfere with self-care or care-giving

Resources

- **Life Skills Support Center, Andrews AFB**
  - **240-857-7186**
- **Family Practice Clinic**
  - **240-857-4052**
- **Base Chaplain**
  - **301-981-2111**
- **Family Pediatrician**
  - **240-857-2723**
- **Family Support**
  - **301-981-7087**

Summary

- General and age-specific responses to trauma
- Ways of caring for self and others
- When to Seek Help

Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of the overcoming
of it

Helen Keller